

# Get A Grip on What the Bible says About The Church and Membership

## Session 3

### A Big Responsibility: More About Membership in the Local Church

#### Introduction:

In the New Testament, **the church** is “the people of God who have been saved by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”

The church is spoken of as **Universal** and as **Local**.

**Membership** in the Universal Church is both *similar and different* in important ways when compared with membership in a local church.

Because God has given the congregation the responsibility of granting membership in a local church, and because people cannot know the heart of another person, **God has given evidence** in his word that the congregation must use as the **standard** for whether or not to grant membership to a particular person.

#### I. What the congregation is Saying When it Grants Membership

- A. “We affirm this person’s profession of faith based on biblical evidence.”

**Profession of Faith** -- a person’s own statement that he/she has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

1. We are affirming what the person believes about salvation (Jn. 3:16, Rom. 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 15:1-3, Ephesians 2:8-9).
2. We are affirming that the person’s life is consistent with that belief (Matthew 7:13-27, James 2:14-26).

- B. “We affirm the validity of this person’s baptism.” OR “We are willing to perform this person’s baptism.”

1. What is valid baptism?
  1. Baptism is performed *after* a person is saved (Matthew 28:19-20).
  2. Baptism is a visible symbol of salvation (**Romans 6:3-4**).
2. If there has been a valid baptism, the church affirms it.
3. If there has not been a valid baptism, the church performs the baptism.

- C. “We enter into mutual accountability with this person as a fellow member of the body of Christ.”

1. The body needs all of its parts, and the body cares for all of its parts (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**).
2. Caring for each other is what accountability is all about.

**Galatians 6:2** – “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

- i. Care can be for physical/material needs.
- ii. Care can be for spiritual needs.
- iii. Care can be for struggles with sin.
  - a. **Galatians 6:1-2** Brethren, even if <sup>1</sup>anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are <sup>b</sup>spiritual, <sup>c</sup>restore such a one <sup>d</sup>in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. <sup>2</sup> <sup>a</sup>Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill <sup>b</sup>the law of Christ.
  - b. **Matthew 18:12-17**

The congregation must evaluate whether or not there is biblical warrant for affirming these things before granting membership (or denying it) to someone. Otherwise, we have no basis for our actions with respect to membership.

## II. What the individual is Saying When he/she Receives Membership

- A. “I have faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior who can forgive me of my sins and make me right with God.” (Profession of Faith)
- B. “I have been baptized by immersion after I trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior.”  
OR “I am willing to be baptized by immersion because I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior.”
- C. “I enter into mutual accountability with this Church as a fellow member of the body of Christ.”

## III. What is the role of the pastors and deacons in the process?

- A. God has appointed pastors/elders in the church for the purpose of leading the church in carrying out her mission and purpose (**Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-3**).
- C. The leadership of the pastors/elders is essential if the church is going to adequately fulfill its responsibility with respect to granting church membership to people.
- C. The pastors/elders should equip others to be involved in this process when necessary, and the pastors/elders should maintain close accountability in this process.
  - **Deacons** can and should fill that role alongside pastors/elders.